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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 001952

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TAGS: PGOV PREL AR ECON
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: ELECTIONS 2007 WEEKLY ROUNDUP:
SEPTEMBER 24-28

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 01893 (B) BUENOS AIRES 1931

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Senator and Victory Front (FPV) presidential candidate Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner continued her foreign-policy based campaign with a trip to New York City, where she pitched Argentina to Wall Street investors. Back home, she launched an interactive website aimed at attracting the youth vote. Former Kirchnerista Economy Minister and presidential candidate Roberto Lavagna announced that he would return the country to his economic plan of 2002 if elected in October and Elisa Carrio was presenting her government program on September 28. Despite last week's heavy press coverage of the opposition's calls for international observers for the national elections October 28, the issue has since disappeared from the headlines. Election authorities continue to review the contested results from Cordoba's September 2 and Chaco's September 16 elections. As Chaco nears an apparent solution, Cordoba remains mired in legal disputes over the manner in which the recount is handled. Despite maintaining a presence in the press, none of the opposition candidates has boosted their poll numbers past 20% nor effectively capitalized on the Kirchner administration's vulnerabilities. END SUMMARY.

The Race for President

¶2. (SBU) Senator and Victory Front (FPV) presidential candidate Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner continued her foreign-policy based campaign with a trip to New York City, where she appealed for more foreign investment for Argentina in an address to U.S. business leaders at the Council of the Americas and sat in on her husband's meeting with former President Clinton. Although press and local contacts reported that many in the U.S. business community remained skeptical of the Kirchners' economic model, Cristina's campaign will likely consider the NYC trip a success, once again showing the Senator on the world stage, and she can bask in the very positive local response to her husband's tough speech on Iran at UNGA (ref B).

¶3. (SBU) Back home, Senator Kirchner launched an interactive website aimed at attracting the youth vote. The site complements the existing, more traditional website for Senator Kirchner's campaign. The existing site

(www.cristina.com.ar) drew heavy criticism when first launched for its use of a ".gov" domain, which are restricted for official government use. The new site (www.cristinacobosyvos.com) is the first to mention Senator Kirchner's running-mate, Radical (UCR) Mendoza Governor Julio Cobos and is aimed at attracting the 20 to 40 year-old vote through interactive videos, blog spaces, and speeches. The site is managed by a group of designers who allegedly report to Press Secretary Enrique Albistur and was reportedly the idea of political consultant Jacques Seguela. Many of the other presidential candidates already have websites outlining their campaigns, including center-left leader Elisa Carrio (www.elisacarrio.com.ar), San Luis Governor Alberto Rodriguez Saa (www.albertorodriguezsaa.com.ar), Neuquen Governor Jorge Sobisch (www.sobischpresidente.com), and former Economy Minister Roberto Lavagna (www.presidentelavagna.com.ar).

¶4. (SBU) Presidential candidate Roberto Lavagna, until 2005 Kirchner's Minister of Economy, announced that he would return the country to his economic plan of 2002 if elected in October. Lavagna criticized the current economic situation in Argentina, claiming that:

-- the nominal dollar exchange rate should not be fixed by presidential decree;
-- income distribution is more unequal now than it was in December of 2005;
-- investment continues to fall and investment levels are similar to those at the time of the 2001 crash;
-- the GOA is falsifying statistics on prices, indigence, poverty levels, and production; and
-- "the lack of investment is due to uncertainty, state intervention in the economy, arbitrariness and a perception of deceleration."

¶5. (SBU) Lavagna also disparaged the Kirchner administration's purchase of a 5% golden share of Argentine flag carrier Aerolineas Argentina and its re-nationalization of formerly French-owned Buenos Aires water/sewage service concession. He added that if elected, he would have Enarsa (state-run energy company) purchase the 25% share of the Argentine assets of Spanish energy giant Repsol YPF that Argentine private sector players are bidding on. Fresh from a visit to Washington, presidential rival Elisa Carrio is unveiling her program September 28 (details in next round-up).

Cordoba and Chaco: Still Re-counting

¶6. (SBU) In Cordoba, the second biggest province, federal elections judge Marta Vidal presided over the opening of 205 ballot boxes (70 from the capital and 135 from the rest of the province) for a manual recount in the ongoing effort to resolve the contested gubernatorial elections. Second-place finisher Luis Juez demanded that all 6,152 ballot boxes be opened and each ballot be manually recounted on the grounds of suspected fraud in the September 2 elections. (Current Vice Governor Juan Schiaretti was the nominal winner on September 2 with a 1.1% advantage over Juez.) Juez has appealed Vidal's decision to open the 205 ballot boxes, saying that she has misinterpreted the electoral law and that she is required to nullify the questionable ballot boxes and call for new elections. Cordoba's capital was the main base of support for Juez, who won the district with 49.63%, while Schiaretti won every other district in the province.

¶7. (SBU) As of September 27, electoral authorities in Chaco province had reviewed more than 50% of the voting station tallies from the September 16 gubernatorial race. FPV candidate Jorge Capitanich had led UCR candidate Angel Rozas on the 16th by 2005 votes or 0.39%, but as of September 27, Capitanich's lead had widened to 10,980 votes or 3.98%. Supporters of Capitanich criticized the electoral authorities for moving so slowly and did not expect to have the final results before October 1.

Comment

18. (C) With favored candidate Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner in New York this week, opposition candidates had an opportunity to capitalize on press coverage. Roberto Lavagna used the release of his economic plan to pile on criticism of Kirchner policies. Candidates Ricardo Lopez Murphy and Elisa Carrio praised Kirchner's strong reprisal of Iran in his address at the UNGA. Alberto Rodriguez-Saa criticized President Kirchner and voiced his concerns for transparency in the October elections. Despite maintaining a presence in the press, none of the opposition candidates has effected a rise in the polls past 20% nor effectively taken advantage of the Kirchner administration's vulnerabilities. With under a month left until the presidential elections, Senator Kirchner continues to lead polls by a comfortable margin. END COMMENT.
WAYNE